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# Factors That Influence The Success of Mah Meri Tribe In Tourism Sector

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## Abstract

The Aboriginal community is often labelled as the poor communities. A high level of poverty among this community is more closely related to the type of employment, the problems of land ownership status and low level of education achievement. Too much dependency on subsistence agriculture or traditional natural resources is the main cause of the community to fall below the poverty level. However, there is also a community who is able to improve the level of their living status through the tourism sector, namely the Mah Meri community. Hence, this study aims to find out the factors that influence the success of the Mah Meri community in the tourism sector. Research methods used is a case study through semi structured interviews with 11 participants who are directly involved in tourist activities such as weaving, carving and dancing. The data was analyzed using Atlas.ti version 7 to find out the factors that influenced the success of this community. The study suggested that there are 7 internal factors and 10 external factors that contributed to their success. It is hoped that the findings of the study will help others Aboriginal community to improve their living status and as success as the Mah Meri tribe.

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**Keywords:** Aboriginal Community, Poverty, Tourism

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## 1. Introduction

The aboriginal community is a minority ethnic population and is the only native community in Peninsular Malaysia (Ma'Rof, 2010). According to the census of 2010, the number of aboriginal people was 178,197. The

socio-economic position of the majority of the aboriginal community still lag behind in many fields, compared to other races in Malaysia. In terms of living area distribution of the aboriginal communities, 38% of them live in the rural area, 61% in the sub-urban, and only 1% in the urban areas. It is consisted of three major races, namely the Negrito, Senoi and Melayu-Proto. Every race is divided into six tribes in which they speak in multiple languages other than the local Malay dialect (JAKOA, 2011).

The Aboriginal community is well known for its rich culture and arts. The wood carving is one of the arts that is still preserved until now. The wood carving is an activity engaged by the aboriginal people to fill their free time, in which the carving product was then used during ritual ceremonies. Out of 18 tribes of Aboriginal communities in this country, only Mah Meri and Jah Hut communities dominate the art of wood carving, in particular carving statues and masks. Their life is full of mystical and belief in the natural living things. Usually the appearance of the statues and masks are inspired by their dreams or stories from their ancestors which were based on myths believed to exist a long time ago (Norasmah & Husnorhafiza, 2011).

Backwardness and poverty are identified as the main challenge faced by the government in their efforts to develop aboriginal communities effectively. Poverty among aboriginal people is said in general, to have also contributed substantially to the national poverty data. These problems not only suppress the aboriginal community development process, but also become an obstacle to help the integration of aboriginal groups within the mainstream national development strategy, as been done for the other ethnic groups. The aboriginal people were known as the community who is depending on forests and local natural sources with subsistence economic activities. About 86% of them were self-employed. Most of the economy is not viable and majority of Aboriginal people is poor. Economic resources also does not guarantee employment and fixed income returns to them because of the low market price, and sometimes deceived by the middle man that controls the price of the goods sold (JAKOA, 2011; Mohamad Hisyam & Ibrahim, 2007; Ramlee, 2008).

Although many efforts have been made by the government for the purpose of eradicating poverty, but this problem still faced by certain communities especially marginalised from mainstream development. Poverty has become a major topic being discussed in the implementation of national development programmes. The aspects of poverty eradication is continuously stressed out, starting from the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which is based on poverty alleviation and restructuring society; to the further policies such as Malaysia Plans, National Development Policy, Vision 2020 and the National Vision Policy. The concentration of poverty has encouraged researchers to review various aspects of these problems including the factors that generating poverty, strategies to solve the poverty, and the effectiveness of the programmes that have been implemented (Noor Azizah & Zalina, 2005).

Tourism is considered as a development strategy that is simple and quick to get foreign exchange compared to other development strategies. This is because tourism resources were available in each destination and furthermore, the local people can be a tourism assets that can attract tourists through the unique culture, way of life and customs. Many communities in developing countries used resources that can be found in their own community area to support their live (Kalsom, Nor Ashikin, & Mohmad Amin, 2004). Hence, tourism is seen as one approach that can be a source of income for aboriginal people in specific, and other communities in general.

The researchers for this study chose the Mah Meri tribes as the sample because of the openness of this community to the tourism sector. The tourism activities is also supported with the establishment of Cultural Village Complex and Craft Center as one of support to the development of the tourism sector in this area. In this study, researchers will determine the factors that influenced the success of this community in the tourism sector. Therefore, the selection of Kampung Sungai Bumbun as the study area was appropriate because this location has become an attraction to the tourists to see and learn about the culture and the uniqueness of the aboriginal community.

Living area of Mah Meri tribe in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey is well-known as a tourist attraction for providing a wide range of activities related to tribes and produces a wide range of high quality products. In fact, the products get recognition from the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization United Nations (UNESCO)

because of its uniqueness (Jami'ah, 2009). Community involvement and exposure in many programs related to tourism showed that the implementation and their participation should be studied in depth so that their success factors can be a model for others aboriginal communities.

Mah Meri, which means "People of the forest" in the term that the Mah Meri tribe called "*bersisik*". They are also known as ocean people (*Orang Laut*) because they live close to the sea and work as fishermen. The Mah Meri community is an ethnic of Senoi group. There are 5 villages of the Mah Meri tribe in Pulau Carey, Kuala Langat, Selangor which has a population of 1,149 people (Muzium Pribumi, 2007). The community is famous for their carving and weaving products. The uniqueness of this revenue have received high requests from tourist, both local and abroad. In addition, they also have their own dance group (Jo Oh) who is often performed in the Culture Village Complex or the festival outside their village. The development of Culture Village Complex has opened a space for this community to expand their activity and tourism program.

The Mah Meri tribes was familiar with mangrove forests, rivers and coastline, it adopts the culture out of his own to make them easier to mix with the external community. They respect the freedom of individuals who brought from first again with a mix of Animistic, Buddhist, Muslim and Hinduisme.

## 2. Problems Statement

The problem of poverty is a major issue among aboriginal people. It is also supported by a variety of other issues such as migration, open-minded, and lack of knowledge. Therefore, seeing the success factor in aboriginal tourism is a new approach in transforming the fate of this community that often termed as the isolated, poor and backward communities. Therefore, this study is important for researchers to take the experience of a successful community with openness of mind to the tourism industry by making this community as a ' benchmark ' to other aboriginal communities to receive tourists and tourism activities as a positive career opportunities for current and future generations. This is because there are still more than some aboriginal tribes (Batek Community) is unable to receive tourist arrivals due shall be deemed to interfere with the rights of ' privacy ' of the individual, the right to defend the purity of cultures, commit from the independence move sourcing requirements, health threats and infectious diseases as well as exploited by others (Zanisah, Nurul Fatanah & Mustaffa, 2009). This situation occurs due to various taboos and practices to be observed that sometimes they are not understood by tourists. Therefore, this community does not fully beneficial from tourism activities.

Researchers choose Mah Meri community as a result of interview with Sungai Bumbun Village Security and Development Committee noted that tourism has brought major changes to the source of family income. In addition they receive tourism as a new thing that many positive returns by filling their free time with tourism activities. For researchers there is a gap that has yet to be studied involve the community that is becoming increasingly open to the reception of tourist arrivals. Mah Meri community on be categorised as an aboriginal community success work because a lot of involvement in nationally and internationally in promoting their identity to the community via tourism activities. In addition, the selection of the tourism sector in helping marginalized communities is a positive approach if implemented properly and not cause any negative effects as described in some studies. Through the case studies undertaken, hopefully it will be a guide and model especially for aboriginal community still has his poverty and omissions from various aspects of physical and mind to make the opportunities in the tourism sector as a tool that can solve the problem of poverty.

## 3. Methods and Analysis Study

This research is a case study in the form of exploration using qualitative methods. Qualitative data collection will also take into account the openness of the respondents to the study. The process managing and analyzing data

collected by researchers are as follows:

(1) Transcription

Do transcription for data interviews, video footage and notes field.

(2) Organize the data

Every transcription will be given specific code number or nickname. This process begins by getting an overview read from a transcript, select an interesting transcript and the shortest way, preparing topics and grouping by topic, change the topic to certain codes and write the appropriate code to segments, see the topic with clear descriptions and the best, making the categories with topics grouping related to each other, make the final decision about the abbreviasi for each category to code your letters with certain characters and finally collect data by category and then perform analysis and coding the currently existing data if deemed necessary.

(3) Coding and system category

After gaining a better understanding about the data or the materials collected, researchers will do initial coding or also called aperture coding. Coding process was conducted by using computer system. Researchers will explore the relationship between categories. Next, researchers will make repair of the themes and categories deemed necessary based on the question of the review and framework of the theoretical framework. Finally forming theory and enter the knowledge available.

The process of data analysing is done ongoing basis during the collection of data is done. This situation will allow the researcher to determine the adequacy of the information obtained. This data analysis method's as known a typology method. It is a classification data method in categories according to the pattern and certain themes (Chua, 2008). After that, researchers using the comparison fixed method where researchers will use the data collected (such as observation post) and find indicators for text (such as behavior, characteristics) and coding them in the post. By comparing the text indicators, that does will become the basic idea to the qualitative data. With this method, certain text categories are identified and designated as the main focus of research reports.

#### **4. The Factors that Influence the success of Mah Meri Community**

The internal factor is the individual factors that influence Mah Meri Community are successful in aboriginal tourism. These factors are detailed through Figure 1 where the integration of all these factors led to the transformation process occurs in each individual Mah Meri tribes. Each of these changes has given a positive impact to the success of the community especially in terms of the response to the ability of each individual to be marketed as a source of additional income. There are some individuals have made ability in their weaving, carving and present culture as a main source of income.

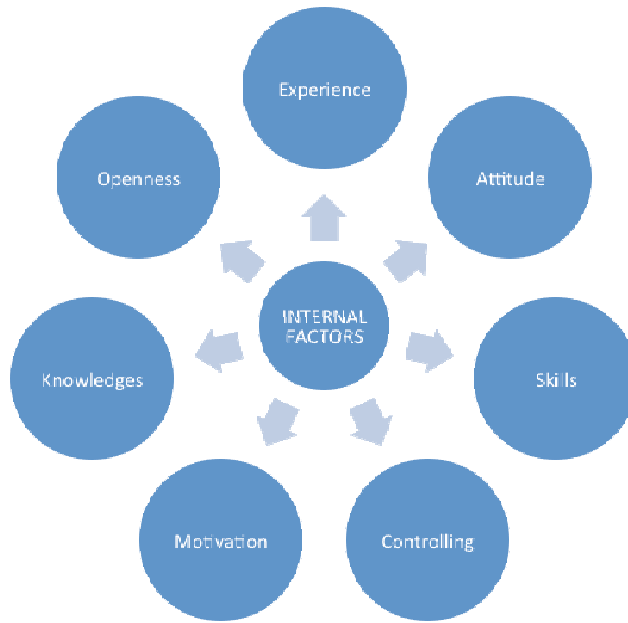


Fig.1. The Internal Factors Influencing Success of Mah Meri Tribe

From a study conducted by Whitfort and Ruhanen (2009) on Aboriginal tourism in Queensland has shown that there are 17 Aboriginal business success factors. When associated with internal factors as a result of the findings study indicated there are 4 factors which give the equation in terms of channel the purpose of the individual factors that brought changes to this community. The factors are:

(1) Training and knowledge

The main factors that led to the success of aboriginal tourism in Queensland. While in Mah Meri community, training and knowledge is also a factor that drives the success of aboriginal tourism.

(2) Ownership

The ownership is the factors that create a positive attitude towards possession of resources and skills available. For Mah Meri community, possession is the nurturing love for inheritance until they pay attention to the quality of the products produced and presented.

(3) Trade Experience

Experience formed a business networking with outsiders. For Mah Meri community, experiences has mastered them in product, marketing, and management of their business.

(4) Respect

Respect is a culture in preserving the culture of the community in their tourism efforts. For the Mah Meri community regards this attitude of openness towards society and the encouraging of sustainable practices to form a product and cultural preservation.

Findings of this study are also supported by studies of Muhamad Yusni (2010), factors that influence the success of an individual element of entrepreneurs involved such as attitudes, skills, interests and knowledge. This is in line with findings from a study in which experience has driven positive attitude among the community of Mah Meri. In addition, the skills and knowledge that is coupled with an interest has resulted in positive returns to this community to succeed.

The findings are also supported with the results of interviews where a public motivation cause these community

motivated to produce quality products and presentation even without charge. This is because motivation will form the interest of someone to things done even without rewards. The Mah Meri tribe are very conscious about the quality of the product. Not the quantity but the quality of the products that lead they want to be preserved. As a result it is suitable if this community recognized internationally. All the factors that has been stated is the main factors supporting the success of Mah Meri community.

The external factor is the factors by which consist of the community and the environment. There are ten factors that drive the success of the Mah Meri community in tourism activities, as in Figure 2.

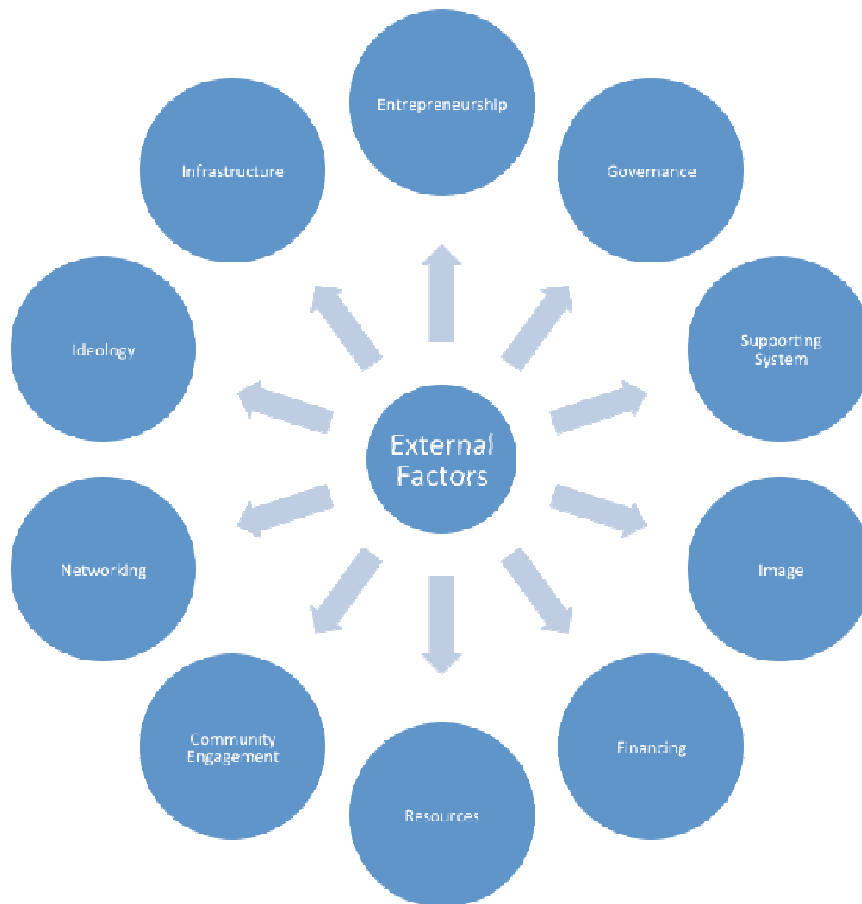


Fig.2. The External factors influencing Success of Mah Meri Tribe

Each of these factors is important in assisting the Mah Meri tribe to succeed. The existing support system very helpful this community to change. It involves government support of the JAKOA (*Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli Malaysia*), NGOs and family support. Through this support, each provision, disclosure, training and so on which is the main impetus to Mah Meri community for more successful can be channelled. The Ministry through the Department of Orang Asli (JAKOA), handicrafts and the Department of Agriculture has built several craft centre, kioks, weave workshop and other facilities as well as provide assistance in terms of equipment for engraving, weave and dance. Therefore, with the urging of the Government has opened the minds of the society Mah Meri for more successful and appreciate the grant from the Government.

JAKOA is the most closely department with the Mah Meri community. Thus the roles of this party contributed changes to this community to be more successful. External factors, such as entrepreneurship, governance, images, financing, resources, community participation, networks, ideology and infrastructure is also a key success factor Mah Meri community. The entrepreneurship factor in Mah Meri community is an important element in developing the business, building courage to compete and being creative and innovative. The governance factor is the working methods in managing tourism activities by establishing an organisational structure in developing their tourism activities. The image is a tourist attraction that becomes a tourism product that can be marketed by making engraving, weaving and cultural activities as their travel images. Funding factors especially in continuing their activities is an important factor. Funding is obtained in the form of contributions of raw materials and equipment. Natural resources from surrounding are important as a raw material to the product that they produce. Community participation in each activity is able to contribute different ideas in diversification of presentations and production of their products. Network collaboration with outside parties has been promoting their tourism activities. The availability of this cooperation network can prevent Mah Meri community from being exploited by middlemen. Ideology is still holds strong in their communities that in itself is an attraction to tourists. Through the availability of this ideology, heritage is continued to the younger generation. Infrastructure factors is important to facilitate networking supporting channelization and encourage a higher tourist arrivals. Parallel as discussed by Butler and Hinch (2007), through a book titled *Tourism and Indigenous People* summarize that the success of aboriginal tourism is dependent on:

- (1) Disclosure/weakness
- (2) Education and training
- (3) Network/Chains
- (4) Images
- (5) The ownership and control
- (6) Ideological
- (7) Relationship

While there are other factors more from researchers, but they still have in common with these success factors aboriginal tourism abroad.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concludes to immerse in aboriginal tourism requires a high commitment in terms of the individual and the community. The aboriginal people such as the Mah Meri tribe should get solid guidance from the JAKOA to their more vulnerable to the current scenario that may be outside of their habits. In addition many things need to be considered especially in terms of increasing knowledge that these people are not exploited and are able to plan their future. Although this community could be considered successful, the dependence on specific sectors like non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government bodies should always have in order to be not too complacent with the achievements that they have now. This is because on average this community still has a low level of education and should always have been so they are not prone to exploitation of those who are not responsible.

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